



pact's

point of view

The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

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Climbing Mount Adoption by Shane Salter

I am a former foster child who wanted more than the breath of life itself to have a permanent family. When I was a little boy, I used to fantasize about the security that new home would bring. I often thought that all of my problems, as enormous as they seemed, could be resolved through the loving arms of a mom and dad. But you see, I kept getting older and older, and the older I got, the more difficult it became to find that loving family who felt I deserved to have a place to call "home," that which is the basic right of all children.

Although I was a very difficult child to raise, I was no more challenging than my little friends who lived with their birth families. I just wanted to know why I wasn't good enough to have a mom and dad, or just a mom, or just a dad. It didn't matter whether I had two parents or not. I often wonder, would it have been easier for me to be adopted if more adults understood the need and potential I had as a little boy? Based on my behavior, who would have ever guessed I'd grow up and become a loving husband, father and successful health-care professional? Yet the potential was in me all the time. Fortunately, I was strong enough to survive, even though many others gave up on me. Unfortunately, many other children awaiting parents are not so strong.

There are many African Americans willing to provide permanent homes for children awaiting parents. We just haven't recruited them yet. However, those of us who have realized our responsibility as a community and have risen to the challenge must aggressively educate and encourage others to do so. For as long as there is one child or sibling group awaiting parents, the struggle continues.

If we had more mountain climbers - ordinary people dedicated to educating and recruiting African American families about the tremendous need - every adoptable child could be placed in a permanent family. Beginning today, the African American community must rise up with an even greater readiness. We must individually look deep into our hearts, identify friends, and most

importantly, discover church organizations that are willing to climb the mountains that will lead to permanent families for our children.

It is the responsibility of middle class Black America, and the Black Church as an institution, to identify homes for every Black child that needs one. Who do we expect to care for our children if we don't?

If African Americans could only look inside the souls of children who are awaiting parents, they would see that these special boys and girls don't understand adults' fear of them. They long to be embraced and told, "we love you for you." These children come in all shades, colors and sizes and desperately need the influence of our ethnic values.

Those of us who are tired and disgusted by the media citing statistics about infant mortality within the Black community, Black-on-Black homicide, and the high school drop-out rate ought to lead the call to arms. Where do we think the answers to these problems begin?

They begin with ordinary folks like you and me. Many church organizations take up causes such as mentoring youth, creating food and clothing drives, staffing substance abuse treatment centers, and supporting community revitalization projects, just to name a few. I am not debating the merit of these causes. However, what could ever be more important than identifying families for Black children? Without the children, there is no future.

I don't want to be like my buddies in the barber shop who simply sit and passionately discuss the problems confronting our youth. I want to know that we have identified everyone who has an extra bedroom and the willingness to give deserving children a place to call home. Only then will we have made significant progress towards strengthening the Black community.

Many of us really do want to obtain the realistic goal of placing every adoptable child into a family. Somehow, though, we look at this big mountain and say, "I'll climb it tomorrow." Our children can't wait for tomorrow. They need us today.

Let us challenge our individual church congregations. Imagine this, 1993, the year that we declare war! We can each rise up and hold every church accountable for identifying one home for a child or sibling group awaiting parents. This concept is what the Black church was built on. This is what God expects of the Black church. In the words of Marian Wright Edelman, "If every Black church placed one foster child in one Black family, we would have no more children in foster care."

We can do it, I know we can. NO MORE EXCUSES! These children are our future health-care administrators, legislators, scientists and teachers. Each of them has the potential. It's up to ordinary people like you and me to help them maximize it.

Let us send a resounding message that we will not neglect telling every Black child that they are the beauty and essence of our future. Let's turn good intentions into action. Not another day should go by in which a Black child awaiting parents will not receive the love, security and rich heritage that a permanent African American family provides.

This is the time for mountain climbers to start climbing Mt. Adoption.

Shane Salter is Manager of Nursing Transport Services for Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC. He spent his childhood yearning to be adopted and now volunteers his tremendous energy to help youngsters in need of permanent homes to find loving families.